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ABSTRACT

To examine the relationship between writers' knowledge of expository frames--conventions accepted by both writers and readers in association with a particular type of discourse--and writing skill, 60 persuasive essays were analyzed for content organization. The essays, evaluated as either above average or average on a high school writing assessment examination, were studied to determine (1) hierarchical organization of arguments, (2) discourse structure, and (3) devices used to highlight themes. A comparison of average and high quality essays revealed more effective global organization among the higher scored papers, producing more adequate, unified, and coherent arguments. These papers also showed greater control over syntactic or grammatical theme-marking devices and had fewer unconventional paragraphs or unrelated themes. The great consistency among readers' evaluations supports the existence of an expository frame by which readers interpret expository texts. Results suggest that average or below average writers can benefit from direct instruction in planning, organizing, and structuring their writing and should be given opportunity to write in a variety of contexts and modes and in response to different audiences and purposes. (MM)

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FRAMES, CONTENT ORGANIZATION, AND THEMES IN STUDENT EXPOSITORY ESSAYS: AN ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE STRUCTURE

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FRAMES, CONTENT ORGANIZATION, AND THEMES IN STUDENT EXPOSITORY ESSAYS:
AN ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE STRUCTURE

The aim of this study was to analyze the structure of student expository essays in terms of writer predispositions and reader expectations--the "frames" by which written communication proceeds. Experienced readers and writers share many of the same expectations about the uses of expository discourse. These expectations are categorized and structured into a frame, that is, a system of linguistic choices which has become associated with a particular language use. This framing process is basic to human behavior. It is a way of organizing our experience of the world so that we can use the acquired frame to predict and interpret new experiences. Divisions by genre in literature are based upon language frames as are the modes of discourse (e.g., narration, description, exposition, argumentation). Genres and modes both conform to certain conventions of structure (frames) by which they can be categorized. In language, framing is the process of indicating through repeatable structures the purposes or intentions of a particular use of language.

In order to describe the interaction of writers and readers through their shared expository frame, I analyzed the structure--content organi-

zation--of sixty expository essays taken from the writing assessment at the University of Michigan. The premise upon which this study was undertaken was that students who have had extensive experience writing and reading expository prose have become familiar with its expository frame and have learned to recognize and use the conventions which make up that frame. On the other hand, students whose experience with language has not been as complete will have great difficulty recognizing and using the structures and conventions which characterize the expository frame used by mature writers to construct and interpret exposition. Furthermore, when writers do construct an essay according to a conventional frame, they provide for readers a familiar structure by which to interpret the ideas presented. Readers also use the frame to help recall the gist of what they read. The frames are themselves conventions learned by writers and readers through extensive experience with written language in various contexts.

The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do writers signal for readers their expository frame?
2. Are there identifiable differences in the frames of essays rated as above average by trained readers and those rated as average? If so, what are they?
3. Is a reader's judgment of quality in essays influenced by a writer's skill at indicating the expository frame?

Theoretical Background: Frame Theory

Linguists such as Tannen (1979) have asked the question, "What's in a frame?" What grammatical or linguistic clues signal the frame for

the reader? Work in linguistics has concentrated on the surface feature forms which offer clues to the reader about the frame. Much work has been done with narrative frames, less with expository frames. Tannen investigates the effects of structures of expectation on language production in an attempt to reveal how we can know what is in a frame. Frames could be discerned in the surface linguistic form of the narratives produced by her subjects. This aspect of her study is important for my own research. Since structures of expectation are discernable in the surface form of sentences produced, I investigated the surface form of my sample texts to draw conclusions about the underlying frame.

Some other researchers have shown the influence that generalized story structures, or story frames, have upon reader comprehension. For example, such reading theorists as Kintsch (1974) and Thorndyke (1977) have been influential in the development of story grammars. Also, Labov (1974) discusses the surface features of oral narratives in his description of language in the inner city. The existence of hierarchical organizational patterns for narrative discourse has been well documented by Longacre (1976), Meyer (1975), and Thorndyke (1977).

Some research focused primarily on reading comprehension has been done with expository frames [Meyer (1975), McKoon (1977), and Jones (1977)]. This research has shown the influence of the hierarchical structure of expository prose on readers, as well as the importance of the position of ideas within the text. These experiments are important to my study because they demonstrate the presence of recognizable expository structures and document their influence upon a reader's understanding of expository prose.

Theoretical Background: Discourse Theory

Discourse is currently being analyzed in several fields from a variety of perspectives. Researchers in artificial intelligence, psychology, and linguistics form the core of discourse analysts. In each of these fields, analyzing discourse is an enormously complex task, and researchers have necessarily compartmentalized the problem so as to minimize the complexities. Thus one finds purely descriptive discourse analyses, such as Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion in English (1976), which identifies and describes those textual features making discourse cohere. One also finds structural analyses, such as Thorndyke's (1977), which describes the grammar and structure of stories.

Discourse theorists have hypothesized that there is a web of interlocking discourse relationships, each contributing to the discourse frame. Grimes (1975) divides these numerous discourse relationships into three groups--content organization, cohesive relationships, and staging relationships.

The content organization refers to the hierarchical pattern, the sets of rhetorical relationships which serve to group ideas into larger complexes and relate them to each other. It also includes lexical relationships between words and phrases which carry important ideas. The cohesive relationships involve information structuring: that is, the means by which new information in a text is related to old information. Cohesive relationships are linear in structure rather than hierarchical, since they cumulatively show how one element in the text is interpreted in relation to a prior element. The staging relationships express the writer's perspective on the discourse by making one part of the dis-

course the topic, or central idea, and relating everything else to it. Though Grimes does not specifically include in staging the interpersonal aspect of the communication, it seems to be an important part of staging to reveal not only the writer's perspective on the subject but also the writer's perspective and attitude towards his/her audience or readers, called the "performative interaction" by speech act theorists (Searle, 1970).

Each of these sets of discourse relationships plays a part in helping the writer define his/her discourse frame, and helping the reader discern it; each plays a part in building a meaningful piece of discourse. In this study, I explored these three sets of discourse relationships to better understand what characterizes the expository frame. Of primary interest to me was the content organization because this set of relationships is very important for exposition with its characteristic informative purpose. A writer ranks data within that content organization into either foreground or background by theme marking. Since expository discourse focuses on subject-matter and is linked by logical structures in its content organization, I set out to determine in this study whether or not skill at theme marking is an indication of a competent writer of exposition.

Related to any analysis of theme marking is the work of European linguists, particularly those associated with the Prague linguistic school (Daneš, 1974). These linguists are primarily concerned with analyzing the sentence into parts which have a function in the total communication process. I find congenial the perspective of analyzing language as it functions in real communicative contexts. However, these

linguists analyze the syntactic and semantic components at the sentence, clause and phrase level of discourse. Though it is important in any discussion of theme to be aware of the work of European linguists, the text-building structures at the sentence level are not directly applicable to my study.

Halliday's work with textual analysis and information structuring includes his analysis of transitivity and theme (1967), and, with Hasan, cohesion in English (1976). Cohesion, as they identify it, is an important component of text-building since it is concerned with the linear ordering and progression of information and with the sentence-to-sentence ties. In my study, I was primarily concerned with the hierarchical relationships within the text, the organization of messages and ideas. But at times it became important to analyze how the discourse cohered as text, since cohesive devices are one tool used to highlight themes. For this reason, although I mainly concentrated on the content organization, I also analyzed some aspects of cohesion as it related to theme marking.

The Method

To answer my first question (How do writers signal for readers their expository frame?), I diagrammed the expository structure of sixty essays written for the Michigan assessment. In order to describe explicitly the hierarchical content organization of the student essays in my sample, I adapted the theme dominance display model developed by Jones in her study of theme in expository prose (see Figures 1 & 2). Jones used a tagmemic linguistic framework, specifically employing Pike's (1967) model

Figure 1*
Student essay #14/B/1-1

1) The Federal Department of Labor estimates that one in four college graduates entering the labor market between now and 1985 will have to take jobs traditionally filled by people without college degrees. 2) Nevertheless, a good liberal arts education is the best preparation for uncertain job requirements and increased leisure time.

3) The liberal arts education is the best preparation for professional school and for graduate studies. 4) The knowledge gained in all fields of the liberal arts curriculum are beneficial for almost all post graduate work. 5) One may ask, "What does the humanities have to do with medicine?" 6) In reply, I might suggest that I don't know one physician who doesn't deal with other human beings and their problems. 7) Understanding people and society and what motivates them could do nothing but help the doctor relate to his patients. 8) The analytical and occupational skills gained in mathematics and the sciences would be beneficial for almost any degree and job possibilites.

9) The liberal arts education enables the student unsure of a major or career to sample a wide range of topics within the liberal arts curriculum, while also fulfilling distribution requirements set up within the college. 10) A student may enter college with no idea of a possible major, however, while fulfilling requirements in different areas he will surely find an area of interest. 11) Moreover, the majors and job possibilities from those majors almost endless. 12) The majors extend from anthropology to zoology, physics to economics, and so on, and career choices are almost as boundless as the majors.

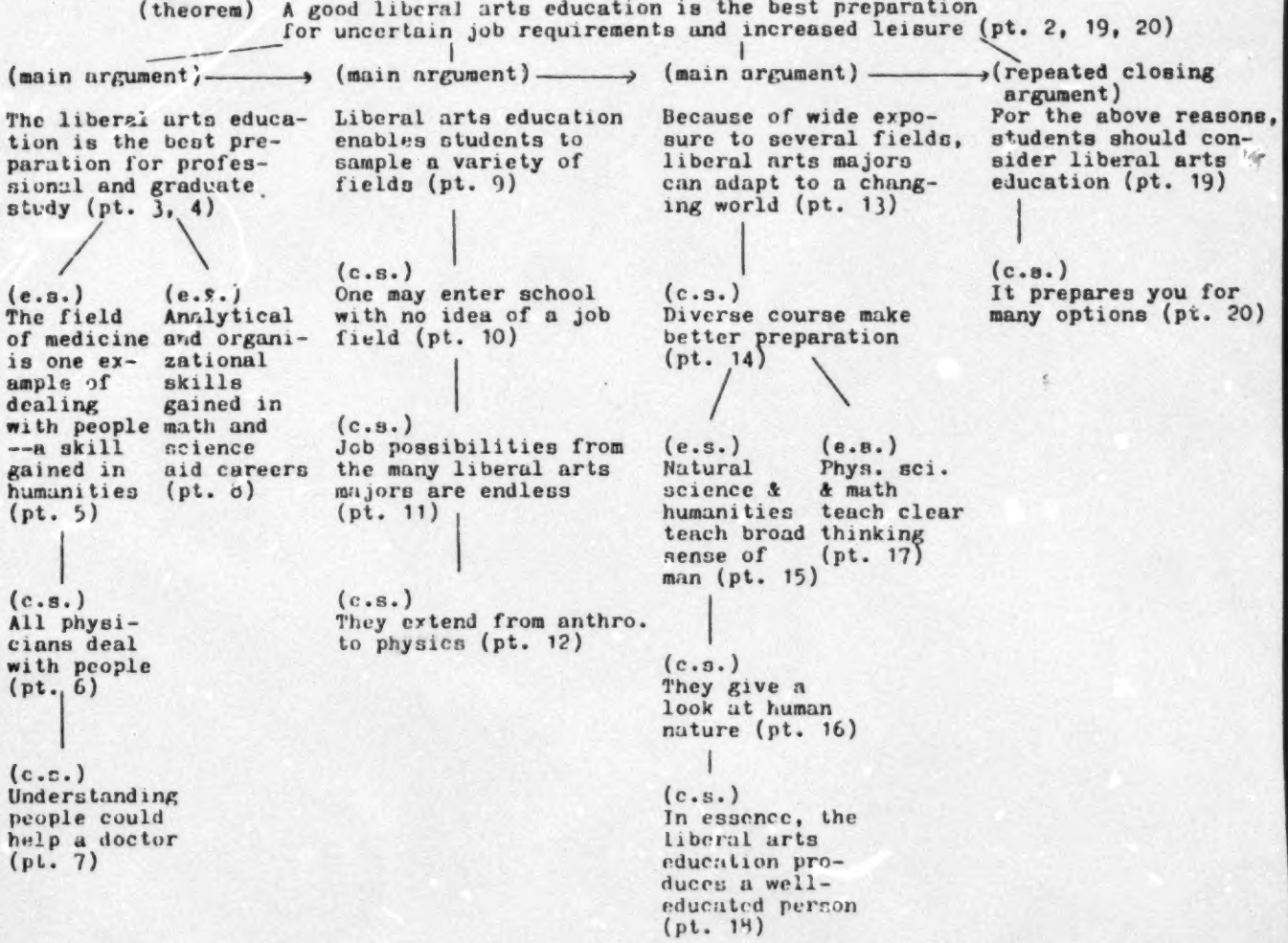
13) Not just educated in one narrow field, but with modest exposure to many, the liberal arts graduate is better prepared to deal with our ever changing world. 14) Because the liberal arts graduate has taken classes in the humanities, natural sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, etc. he is better prepared to face society and its problems. 15) Classes in the natural sciences and humanities teach the history of our world and mankind and show him how to avoid the mistakes of others while emulating their successes. 16) They give the student a look at human nature and how to deal with it. 17) The physical sciences and mathematics teach the person to organize things well and to think and write in a clear, concise logical manner. 18) In essence, the liberal arts education developes a person not just in one narrow area, but instead, developes the liberal arts graduate into a well-educated person moderately educated in many fields and facets of life.

19) Because the job market is tight and people are faced with an ever-growing amount of leisure time, more students entering college should consider the liberal arts education. 20) The liberal arts education not only prepares you for your adult life and the job market upon graduation, it also prepares the student for further graduate work and professional schools, if that is what he desires.

* In all student essays, spelling and punctuation have not been changed from the original.

Figure 2

Dominance Display for Student Essay #14/B/1-1


(theorem) A good liberal arts education is the best preparation for uncertain job requirements and increased leisure (pt. 2, 19, 20)
(main argument)
The liberal arts education is the best preparation for professional and graduate study (pt. 3, 4)
(e.s.) The field of medicine is one example of dealing with people --a skill gained in humanities (pt. 5)
(e.s.) Analytical and organizational skills gained in math and science aid careers (pt. 6)
(c.s.) All physicians deal with people (pt. 6)
(c.s.) Understanding people could help a doctor (pt. 7)
(main argument)
Liberal arts education enables students to sample a variety of fields (pt. 9)
(c.s.) One may enter school with no idea of a job field (pt. 10)
(c.s.) Job possibilities from the many liberal arts majors are endless (pt. 11)
(c.s.) They extend from anthro. to physics (pt. 12)
(main argument)
Because of wide exposure to several fields, liberal arts majors can adapt to a changing world (pt. 13)
(c.s.) Diverse course make better preparation (pt. 14)
(e.s.) Natural science & humanities teach broad sense of man (pt. 15)
(e.s.) Phys. sci. & math teach clear thinking (pt. 17)
(c.s.) They give a look at human nature (pt. 16)
(c.s.) In essence, the liberal arts education produces a well-educated person (pt. 18)
(repeated closing argument)
For the above reasons, students should consider liberal arts education (pt. 19)
(c.s.) It prepares you for many options (pt. 20)

of the referential hierarchy of language in her analysis of thematic structures and the particular effects of thematic structuring on reader comprehension of theme. These theme dominance displays, with some adaptation, can provide a visual description of the content organization of student essays. The referential configurations that are diagrammed in the dominance displays indicate the essay's content organization by displaying the main ideas (themes) at each hierarchical level and showing through the means of a tree structure how themes at each level relate to each other.

I described the content organization of the sixty expository essays in three ways. First, I described those features on the theme dominance displays which provided clues to the content organization; second, I described in a detailed profile the discourse structure of four representative essays; third, I described those theme highlighting devices which had been used to indicate important theoretical ideas and thus signal content organization.

In the theme dominance displays, I identified the main arguments at the highest level of the tree structure because they are the most general of the thematic material and are directly related to the theorem or opinion statement. These main arguments have traditionally been called "topic sentences" of paragraphs. I prefer the terminology main argument to topic sentence because the latter implies there is only one sentence which can be clearly identified as the topic sentence of the paragraph. However, often a main argument is the synthesis of two or more points in the paragraph. The dominance displays accommodate this factor by stating main ideas as paraphrases of one or more points.

Drawing upon Christensen's (1978) model of the generative rhetoric of paragraphs, I identified subsequent points relevant to the main argument but at a lower level of generality as either proceeding in a subordinate or a coordinate sequence. This pattern can also be seen in the tree structure of the dominance display. The clarifying support points (c.s.) are subordinate, thus more specifically used to clarify preceding points. The enumerative support points (e.s.) are coordinate to each other and serve to elaborate through enumerating examples at a parallel level of specificity. Sometimes background information is included by the writer prior to a main argument as preliminary or contextualizing information. Points which include background facts or presuppositions are listed as background points on the dominance display diagrams. This display helps to schematicize the content organization.

The lines in the tree diagram refer to logical links which tie the various parts of the hierarchy together. The vertical lines relate the higher-level more general themes to the lower-level more specific themes. The horizontal lines show the linear progression, especially the use of cohesive devices to link the levels in the hierarchy when there are skips from lower to higher levels. A broken line indicates a fuzzy link in the logical progression, either horizontally or vertically. I was especially concerned to indicate on the diagrams problems exhibited in the essays at reorienting the reader to a new paragraph. These can be seen on the diagram as a broken horizontal line between main arguments. Following Christensen's model, I noted the paragraphing in the essays and marked as unconventional paragraphing those points where the new paragraph did not correspond to a return to a higher level of generality

in the essay.

To answer my second question (Are there identifiable differences in the frames of essays rated as above average by trained readers and those rated as average? If so, what are they?), I compared both the theme dominance displays and the essay profiles by assessment rating. My sample included 30 essays which had been rated clearly as above average (or high-score) by two readers, (1 - 1 on a 4 point scale) and 30 essays which had been rated clearly as average (or mid-score), (3 - 3 on a 4 point scale). The essays, which had all been written for the 1980-81 Michigan assessments in response to the same 2 assessment questions, were anonymous and not marked as to their rating.

I analyzed content organization using the dominance displays and then described how the high- and mid-score essays were similar or different in their content organization. The analysis resulted in counts for twelve features from the dominance displays (see Table 1). As an indication of the amount of <u>elaboration</u> (complexity and completeness) in the essays, I counted 1) the average number of words per essay, 2) the number of paragraphs per essay, 3) the number of main arguments, 4) the number of clarifying support points, 5) the number of enumerative support points, and 6) the number of background points. Computing the amount of elaboration at the various levels served to indicate how the content was organized into general and specific information. As an indication of the amount of <u>repetition</u> in the essays, I counted 7) the number of repeated arguments, 8) the number of repeated closing arguments, 9) the number of repeated support points. Computing the amount of repetition at various levels served to indicate how the main ideas

TWELVE FEATURES FOR STIMULUS #14 BY OPTION

TABLE 1

		Average number of words		Number of paragraphs		Number of main arguments		Number of clarifying points		Number of enumerative points		Number of background points		Number of repeated arguments		Number of repeated closing arguments		Number of repeated support points		Number of unconventional paragraphing		Number of ineffective reorientations		Number of unrelated arguments and support points	
Rating		1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3
Option A	1	660	336	6	1	6	2	4	5	2	7	7	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	2
	2	490	490	4	7	2	1	8	2	0	0	8	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	3	392	392	5	5	3	4	4	0	2	2	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
	4	396	336	2	4	3	1	5	5	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	5	392	770	1	9	2	4	4	7	3	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	15	0	0	0	2	0	5
Total		466 (Average)	465	18	26	16	12	25	19	7	13	15	9	0	1	3	3	0	15	0	4	1	5	1	10
Option B	1	490	490	5	7	3	3	9	5	4	3	0	4	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	1
	2	490	252	5	6	3	3	8	12	9	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
	3	560	460	5	6	5	1	8	4	8	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0
	4	420	590	2	4	3	2	5	9	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
	5	492	790	5	9	4	4	14	14	6	0	0	7	0	2	0	1	0	14	0	3	1	2	0	0
Total		490 (Average)	516	22	32	18	13	44	44	27	11	3	14	0	2	2	4	1	27	1	5	1	5	0	7
Option C	1	420	336	4	4	4	4	6	10	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
	2	350	392	3	5	3	3	3	8	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	3	336	560	4	5	3	3	2	4	6	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	4	560	420	8	5	5	3	4	5	12	2	0	5	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	2	0	1	0	2
	5	784	336	4	5	7	3	15	5	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Total		490 (Average)	409	23	24	22	16	30	32	25	9	4	6	0	1	2	5	1	2	7	2	0	2	0	3
Totals for A,B,C		482	463	63	82	56	41	99	95	59	33	22	29	0	4	7	12	2	44	8	11	2	12	1	20

were reinforced and kept before the reader through repetition and paraphrase. Finally, I looked for indications of problem areas within the content organization by counting 10) the number of unconventional paragraphings, 11) the number of ineffective reorientations at paragraph boundaries, and 12) the number of unrelated arguments and support points. Computing the number of problem areas served to indicate where breakdowns in the content organization occurred.

To answer my third question (Is a reader's judgment of quality in essays influenced by a writer's skill at indicating the expository frame?), I devised a two-part reading investigation using a sub-set (16) of the essays already analyzed and employing four Michigan assessment readers who had all participated in the 1981 summer assessment. In the first part of the investigation, the readers were asked to underline the important ideas (main themes) in their essay group. In this way, I hoped to find out which arguments were clearly marked by the writer as thematically prominent. For the arguments on which there was unanimous agreement between readers concerning thematic prominence, I looked carefully at the thematic devices used. The second part of the experiment involved a reliability check on my own diagramming of content organization. The readers were asked to duplicate the dominance display system for a set of essays, representing as closely as possible the content organization they discerned. Then, I compared their dominance displays to those I had done earlier in this study.

Findings and Discussion

One important way writers signal for readers their expository frame

is through the essay structure--content organization. The specific constituents identified in my description of content organization can be seen on Table 1. (The table representing the remaining 30 essays in the study has been omitted from this report due to space limitations). The theme highlighting devices also played a part in signalling the expository frame to the reader. The important theme highlighting devices in exposition, as identified by Jones, can be divided into four types: 1) the order of sentences within paragraphs; 2) the order of words within sentences; 3) special constructions--a. passives, b. relative clauses, c. rhetorical questions, d. topicalization; 4) cohesive devices--a. reference, b. conjunction, c. lexical collocation. In my analysis of theme highlighting in the representative essays, I found all four types influenced my dominance display analysis of themes in the content organization of the essays.

The Michigan assessment instrument itself was designed to indicate for the student writer the appropriate expository frame (see Figure 3). The assessment instrument provides the writer with a context and explicit instructions for development of the essay response. Also, the assessment instrument delineates for the writer the subject, audience, and purpose, and places constraints upon the text by providing the beginning of the text itself. To complete the exam successfully, the writer needs to both recognize and produce the expository frame demanded by the task. The particular frame outlined by each assessment instrument calls for an informal proof whereby the writer is to convince or persuade the audience through the use of specific arguments related to the topic. Consequently, much of the expository frame is built into the assessment. To

produce the indicated frame, the writer must explicitly map the hierarchical relationship of ideas--the content organization--in his or her essay. Jones identified five important skills that readers need when interpreting expository frames. I found evidence that these same skills are important for writers in mapping their content organization:

1) Using and identifying expository performatives and scripts (such as the informal proof).

2) Using key grammatical devices and syntactic structures to highlight themes.

3) Using the general-to-specific principle.

4) Using multiple themes, and marking hierarchical relationships through syntactic operations and word ordering.

5) Using repeated thematic items and lexical ties.

Figure 3

STIMULUS #14

Your local high school will publish a pamphlet on "Higher Education and Some Alternatives" that will include the views of students, teachers, and alumni. Write an essay for the pamphlet that you believe would help high school seniors plan for an unpredictable job market.

Begin your essay with the following sentence (which you should copy into your bluebook):

> The Federal Department of Labor estimates that one in four college graduates entering the labor market between now and 1985 will have to take jobs traditionally filled by people without college degrees.

Select <u>one</u> of the following as your second sentence and copy it into your bluebook:

A. This prediction should not discourage high school graduates from going to college, but they would be wise to major in such fields as business administration or computer science.

B. Nevertheless, a good liberal arts education is the best preparation for uncertain job requirements and increased leisure time.

C. Since it takes four years and an average of $20,000 to obtain a college degree, many high school seniors should consider alternatives to a college education.

Now complete your essay developing the argument that follows from the first two sentences. Do your best to make your argument convincing to the students who will read your advice.

The comparisons of content organization for high-score and mid-score essays were particularly revealing. According to Jones, the first theme highlighting skill important for readers/writers is that of "using and identifying expository performatives and scripts." This is a crucial skill for writers in an essay assessment such as Michigan's. The writer must identify the persuasive purpose as the highest level theme of the essay. Correspondingly, the writer must identify the informal proof organizational plan (script) and demonstrate its appropriate use. The constituents of the informal proof are suggested in the exam instrument instructions; for example, "make your argument convincing," indicates the constituent "argument." The choice of a second sentence gives the writer a "theorem" statement. Because of their experience with similar writing contexts, capable writers will recognize the appropriate plan and use it to construct an adversative structure, in which the writer presents his/her own position more favorably than other conceivable positions on an issue in order to persuade the reader to share the position. In my dominance display analysis, all of the essays were using the constituents of the informal proof script, but the high-score essays were better at using the adversative argument structure. Several of the unrelated arguments

found in the mid-score essays were the result of stating other possible positions on the issue which were not compatible with the chosen theorem.

Jones' second theme skill is "using key grammatical devices and syntactic structures to highlight themes." The mid-score essays did not use as many of these devices, and they did not use them as clearly or as consistently as the high-score essays. Especially, the mid-score essays did not adequately indicate which themes were more prominent than others; thus there was confusion as to what the main ideas were in the essays.

Jones' third theme skill is "using the general-to-specific principle." Using my constituents, this skill could not be measured directly but could be inferred from the unconventional paragraphing and unrelated arguments or support points. For example, the mid-score essays contained instances of confused paragraphing wherein the essay did not follow the usual pattern of returning to a more general level at paragraph boundaries. Unconventional paragraphing could indicate a confusion on the part of the essay writer as to the use of specific support and general arguments. Some of the unrelated arguments may also have been the result of confusion about general thematic material. In other words, an argument that did not occur as a general statement may have appeared to be unrelated to its theorem.

Jones' fourth theme skill is "using multiple theme, and marking hierarchical relationships through syntactic operations and word ordering." The writers of mid-score essays were less skillful at marking themes through using the lead sentence of the paragraph, using the subject slot for important ideas, using special constructions, and using

cohesive devices (specifically reference and conjunction). The mid-score essay writers used an excessive amount of repetition and thus did not exhibit an understanding of Jones' fifth theme-marking skill: "using repeated thematic items and lexical ties." Though the mid-score essay writers had used such ties, they did not use them as skillfully as the high-score essay group, and this resulted in too much unnecessary repetition.

In summary, the high-score essay writers exhibited a better understanding of how to use global features of thought and organization to produce a more adequate presentation of argument, a more unified and coherent presentation of content. As well, they were better able to signal the content organization through the use of theme-marking. It is both the global features and the theme-marking skills which serve to separate the mid-score from the high-score essays. Embodied in these features and skills are many of the conventions readers use by which to judge quality in exposition, in other words, their expository "frame."

To discover how the expository frame influenced readers, in the first part of the reading investigation, I asked the four readers to underline the important ideas in each essay in order to find out which arguments were marked as thematically prominent. The readers and experimenter agreed on at least one main point per essay, and all essays showed some agreement. As can be seen from Table 2, the experienced readers agreed more than half the time on what constituted important thematic information in exposition and they were confident about their own judgments. Even more interesting were the differences in percent of agreement and confidence for the high-score and mid-score essay groups,

showing greater agreement and confidence for the high-score essays.

TABLE 2

IDENTIFICATION OF MAIN ARGUMENTS - TOTALS

	Group I	Group II	Total
Agreement	52%	64%	58%
Confidence*	3.2	3.9	3.6

Totals by Rating (1-1) High-score

	Group I	Group II	Total
Agreement	64%	69%	67%
Confidence	3.8	4.3	4.1

Totals by Rating (3-3) Mid-score

	Group I	Group II	Total
Agreement	50%	59%	55%
Confidence	2.8	3.5	3.2

*Confidence Scale	Very Confident 5	Confident 3	Not At All Confident 1

I then explored further the theme highlighting devices used by writers by analyzing the 24 points in the 16 essays for which there was unanimous identification (readers and experimenter) of main ideas. I wished to discern which grammatical and syntactic devices the writers had used to indicate thematic prominence.

At the points where readers and experimenter agreed upon the main arguments, writers had used several theme highlighting devices to mark the important ideas. Each main argument contained at least four of the identified theme highlighting devices, and some contained as many as eight in one sentence. Each of the four identified theme highlighting

devices played a role in marking thematic prominence. Jones hypothesized that readers interpret thematic devices in the same way they interpret grammatical information in essays and that they use their interpretation to reconstruct the content organization indicated by the writer in each text. Presumably, the more clearly marked a point is by theme highlighting devices, the more likely it is that all readers will interpret that point as being thematically prominent. In the second part of my reading investigations, I asked the readers to duplicate the theme dominance displays in order to check the reliability of my own analysis of content organization as well as to discern whether that organization is retrievable from the surface structure of the text.

In addition, for each point at which readers and experimenter agreed upon a main argument, I identified the types of theme highlighting devices. The number of times each device occurred in the 16 essays can be seen on Table 3.

TABLE 3

INCIDENCE OF THEME HIGHLIGHTING DEVICES

Device	# of times occurring	Device	# of time occurring
1) First sentence in paragraph	14	4) Cohesive ties	57
2) Important lexical item in subject slot	16	a. reference (sentence-to-sentence)	10
3) Special construction	17	b. conjunction	12
a. passive	2	c. lexical collocation (repetition, paraphrase)	35
b. relative clause	10		
c. rhetorical question	1		
d. topicalization	4		

My comparison of the dominance displays can be seen on Table 4. The first column, agreement, shows my overall impression of dominance displays and their similarity in structure to mine. If the overall structure was totally alike, it received a rating of 3; moderately alike, 2; not at all alike, 1. Translating those figures into percentages, Reader C's diagrams corresponded to the experimenter's 75% of the time, Reader D's diagrams 79% of the time (amount correspondence ÷ possible amount of correspondence). The remaining column shows the correspondence for specific constituents on the diagrams. A (+) indicates agreement on more than 60% of the constituents, a (−) indicates agreement on 60% or fewer of the constituents. This brief experiment showed that readers can use the dominance display method to diagram content organization with a reasonable degree of reliability.

The first part of the reading investigation showed there is considerable agreement among readers concerning what ideas are important in a text. In addition, the content organization in the high-score essays fit the readers' expository frame more closely, thus contributing to the evaluation of the high-score essays as better in quality.

The second part of the experiment showed the reliability of the dominance display method of analysis. More importantly, though, the second part of the experiment confirmed the existence of the expository frame by which readers interpret expository texts, since the readers were able, generally, to replicate the dominance displays. Especially there was a correlation in the diagrams between hierarchical levels: readers agreed on which information was general, at a higher level in the tree structure, and which was specific, at a lower level in the

TABLE 4

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN READERS AND EXPERIMENTER

		Reader C				Reader D			
Essay #	Rating	Agreement	Main Argument	Support Points	Coherence	Agreement	Main Argument	Support Points	Coherence
II-1	(1-1)	3	+	+	+	2	-	+	+
2	(3-3)	3	+	+	+	2	-	+	+
3	(3-3)	2	-	+	-	2	-	+	+
4	(1-1)	2	+	-	+	2	-	+	+
5	(3-3)	2	+	-	+	3	+	+	+
6	(3-3)	2	-	+	+	3	+	+	+
7	(1-1)	3	+	+	+	3	+	+	+
8	(1-1)	1	-	-	+	2	-	+	+
Total %		75%				79%			

Key

3 - totally alike
2 - moderately alike
1 - not at all alike
(+) - agree more than 60% of the time
(-) - agree 60% or less

tree structure. Readers also agreed upon essays in which the content organization failed to show coherence (logical relationships between hierarchical levels). Readers have very definite expectations about what should conventionally occur in exposition: what arguments should follow which in sequence and how those arguments should be related to the theorem and to the support points. The coherence measurement in this experiment shows that the mid-score essays were not as successful at fulfilling those coherence expectations as were the high-score essays. No reader identified any coherence problems for any high-score essay, yet every mid-score essay was seen to have at least one coherence problem, if not more. Thus, the readers were using their expository frame to make a judgment about which essays were examples of successful exposition. One of the factors which undoubtedly influenced the readers in their evaluation of the student essays was the relative skill a writer displayed at using the expository frame.

Implications

Because of the difficulties mid-score essay writers in my study had with identifying and using the expository frame, I feel writing teachers should stress the importance of planning, organizing, and structuring, but also should stress the importance of reading to writing instruction. Teaching efforts should help students to form overall goals and keep them in mind during the actual writing process. Students must be given chances to write in a variety of contexts and modes, using a variety of audiences and purposes, and they should be encouraged to keep the larger context in mind during their writing. The ability to keep larger goals

in mind while making smaller, sentence-level decisions comes from extensive practice with many writing situations wherein the writer must develop an overall rhetorical strategy in order to succeed at the task, and from extensive reading experience with different types of discourse. Students must be encouraged to actively think about the frame of each piece of writing during the planning stages. In other words, they must be encouraged to consider the audience, purpose, and structure for each piece of writing in addition to considering their own perspective on the subject.

Planning the content organization results in the organization of the text being manifest in the smallest linguistic units, as was seen in my analysis of theme highlighting. There is also support for the use of frames found in evidence in reading research. This research points to a composing process which occurs in readers as they try to comprehend a text. Readers are helped greatly in their reconstruction of meaning by the evidence of a frame in the text itself. Meyer (1982), therefore, suggests that writing plans (a goal plus the steps to achieve that goal) can be employed by writers to help them conceive and organize a topic, to help the writer show the reader what ideas are important, and to help the writer see how new ideas are related to known information. In using writing plans, students are explicitly signaling their expository frame for the reader.

At first students will benefit greatly by explicitly signaling their expository frame in a recognizable content organization. Gradually, they can reduce the number of explicit signals and rely on the implicit structure of their own writing frame to convey the content

organization, and thus their ideas, to their chosen audience.

Language has a wealth of resources for connecting ideas, for organizing ideas, for highlighting ideas and students must gain conscious control over these resources. The goal is to get students in a composition class to perceive patterns as they themselves read and write, rather than to perceive complete structures in advance. As students learn to understand the many linguistic and rhetorical choices they have within the expository frame, they will be able to gain control over their own language use.

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